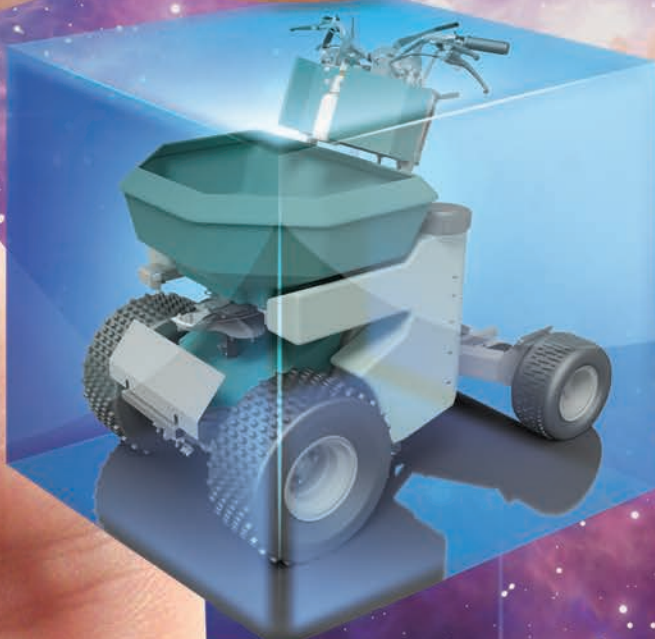


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NEW VIDEO ON LANDSCAPEMANAGEMENT.NET

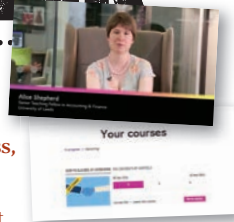


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EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI
EDITOR

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“7” rules

My husband, who's been having some trouble with a manager at work, came home one evening laughing about the sign posted on this man's office door. It's titled: “7 rules for kicking ass in life.”

We've all seen lists like this. We've “liked” them on social media. We've forwarded them to others. Maybe we've even printed them off and tacked them up ourselves.

The problem here? Said manager's direct reports have observed he does not, by most standards, “kick ass in life.” So his attempt at motivation has fallen way short. In fact, it's turned into a complete joke.

“If you declare too many values, you'll end up a hypocrite. And people don't trust hypocrites.”

Risa Mish, a senior lecturer of management at Cornell's Johnson School of Management and a former employment law attorney, would say this man has a credibility problem.

Mish, who gave the keynote talk at the National Association of Landscape Professionals Leaders Forum in Los Cabos, Mexico, in late February, says you gain credibility by being trusted, having relevant experience and being knowledgeable. About 100 landscape professionals attended the conference.

When you're not credible, you can't be influential and, in turn, you lack the ability to be a good leader.

Effective leaders know their own strengths and, most importantly, know—and live by—their core values, Mish says.

To be a good boss and an authentic leader, use these criteria to narrow down your core values to your top three: They must be something you cherish, you've chosen for yourself, you act upon and you've sacrificed for.

She emphasized it's important to identify just a few you can own and consistently act upon.

“If you declare too many values, you'll end up a hypocrite. And people don't trust hypocrites,” she says.

Again, it's all about credibility. People can just *tell* when you're not authentic, Mish says, and it undermines everything you do.

Which brings me back to my husband's manager. If you're like me, you're pretty curious about the “7 rules” on this guy's list. Here they are:

- See failure as a beginning, not an end.
- If you don't go after it, you won't have it.
- Always do more than is expected of you.
- Teach others what you know.
- Assume nothing and question everything.
- Make peace with the past, or you'll pay for it.
- Stop thinking so much and start acting.
- Never compare yourself to others.

Not bad, right? All good advice anyone would be smart to follow. But there's one more credibility problem with this list of “7” things. It contains eight items. 🙄



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you encourage all landscape industry
companies to take a hard look at?**

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LOCATION Avery County, N.C.

COMPANY Greenleaf
Services, Newland, N.C.

THE DETAILS The clients wanted their new home's outdoor space to blend within their 100-year-old neighborhood, located on a single-lane road. The humble facade of the residence was intentional, and the clients wanted understated landscaping, as well. Specific requests included using native woodland materials; preserving existing century-old hemlock trees; adding sod-and-locust staircases reminiscent of their deer stalking trips to Scotland; maintaining an open lawn area; and providing space for guest parking.

This was a new construction site with many challenges to overcome, such as steep terrain, drainage issues, erosion problems and a poor initial site grade (done by a contractor). Greenleaf Services had just five weeks to complete the project—and most of the work was done in the rain.

This and other aspects of this project earned Greenleaf Services a 2015 Grand Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program.

See more photos from this project at LandscapeManagement.net/BigPicture.

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NEWS HOW-TO'S

LANDSCAPE
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AND TIPS

RECOMMENDER

BRUCE'S VIEW

STEP BY STEP

NEW STUFF

SAFETYWATCH

SIMPLE ANSWERS



There is no such thing as a stupid question, especially when it can prevent a mistake.

Still, it's stupid to waste time on repetitive ones.

Mike Pruitt—owner of Master's Landscape Design in Mount Juliet, Tenn.—noticed his managers and foremen answered the same, simple questions day after day.

"I got so tired of bringing new guys in for the season and the foreman were spending six months trying to train these guys," he says.

Pruitt, whose company brings in about \$750,000 a year doing high-end residential design/build work, created a Google Drive folder as a hub for essential company information.

"It's cut the time it takes to onboard new guys in half," Pruitt says. "They don't have to track down a manager to get an answer to a simple question."

While on the go, from mostly company-supplied smartphones, employees can access the employee handbook, directions to suppliers, frequently asked questions and diagrams of where each tool belongs inside the trucks—which has created uniformity from truck to truck. This year, the company will add instructional photos and videos, including how to maintain equipment, how to fix simple and frequent malfunctions, and how to perform basic tasks. The docs even explain what an employee seeking a promotion must do to earn it.

"Per team member, it probably saves at least an hour per man a week, easily," he says.

“It's cut the time it takes to onboard new guys in half.”



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JOHN DEERE

RECOMMENDER

What compact track loader do you recommend and why?

Andrew Jenkins, president of Visual Edge in Aldie, Va., is partial to Caterpillar machines. "Once you've run one the rest just don't seem the same. No comparison," he says.



MATT HUTTON
CEO, HUTTON'S LANDSCAPES
SAVANNAH, GA.

"We purchased a new fleet of JCB compact track loaders for many reasons, one of which is safety. JCB's single-arm PowerBoom design makes it possible for operators to enter and exit the machine through a side door and enjoy exceptional all-around visibility from inside the cab. We also appreciate the machines' myCHOICE feature that allows our operators to customize their skid-steer travel and loader control settings."



KEITH KURIAN
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"I have a 2011 Kubota SVL75 with 1,600 hours on it. I use it for landscaping in the summer and snow clearing in the winter, and I have multiple attachments for it. I prefer Kubota because of their reputation for reliable equipment, and my machine has definitely not disappointed. It has all the power you'll ever need. Its lifting capacity is great. It will reach high enough to load most tandems, and the sliding door that opens up instead of out is a great feature."

BRUCE'S VIEW

BY BRUCE WILSON



The author, of Bruce Wilson & Co., is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at bruce.wilson@brucewilsoncompany.com.

DON'T GIVE UP ON LOST CUSTOMERS


Most customers are always customers, whether they continue doing business with you or not. Most of the time, we forge ahead when we lose a client. We focus on generating new business, ways to keep existing business and simply moving on from the accounts we lose. But ignoring lost business leaves money on the table. Develop a plan to get them back.

First, gather data that identifies which lost customers are most likely to return and which customers would be most profitable if they did. How the relationship ended is significant. If you didn't lose the customer over service or quality—or if there was a glitch that you made good on by serving the customer at a high level even after receiving the cancellation notice, it's likely you can win them back.

The customer may not be having his or her needs met by the new service provider. Keeping in touch and taking the high road may pay off if the new company stumbles.

Weigh how much effort to put into re-engagement against the potential value of the recovered customer. Consider:

1. Gross margin on the primary contract work. Is it a profitable job or book of business?
2. How much do they invest in enhancements?
3. Have they given you referrals in the past?

The stronger these three metrics, the more effort is justified. Over time, my experience is this effort yields a higher close rate than bidding new work. 



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STEP BY STEP

Apply a soil drench to trees


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Soil drenching is the process of adding diluted control products directly to the base of a plant. It provides deep, targeted treatment and is a useful way for professionals to apply insecticides to trees with pest infestations. It also can be a way to apply fertilizers to plants with specific nutrient needs. During a soil drench, the product is poured directly over a plant's roots near the stem or trunk. This method allows the applicator to prevent the chemical from contacting other plants.

Soil drenches often take effect slowly because the chemicals need time to be absorbed by the roots and spread to the stems, branches and leaves. That's why the best time to apply a soil drench is early in the growing season. It's also important for tree and shrub care professionals to apply a soil drench when the plant is well hydrated, as the chemicals will spread through the plant more efficiently if water is already moving through its system.

Before applying a soil drench, first correctly identify the target pest and select the appropriate product. Read the product label to understand safety precautions and determine treatment timing. Always follow state regulations regarding applicator licensing.

Follow these steps to apply a soil drench to a tree or a group of trees safely and correctly. 

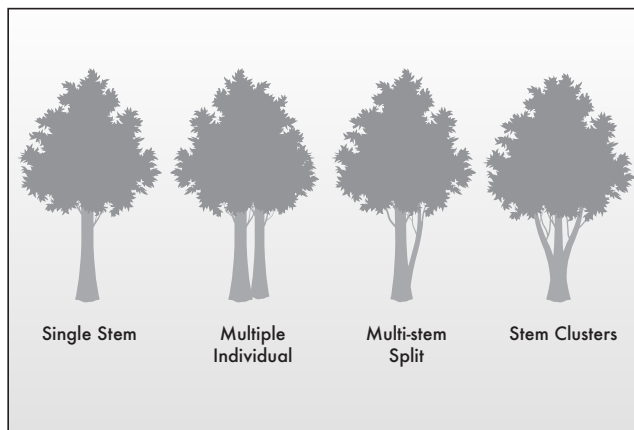
➔ STEP 1

At 4.5 feet above the ground, wrap a measuring tape around the trunk of the tree. Divide the measurement by 3.14 to get the tree's diameter at breast height (DBH). Use these guidelines to determine the DBH for a tree with multiple stems.

Multiple individual trees growing in close proximity: For trees that have grown close together, measure the DBH of each stem and treat each stem individually.

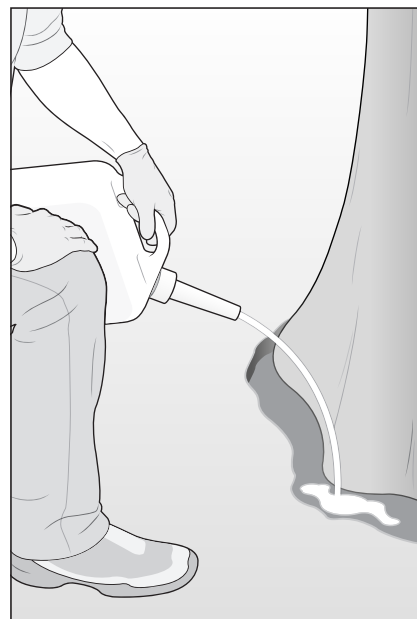
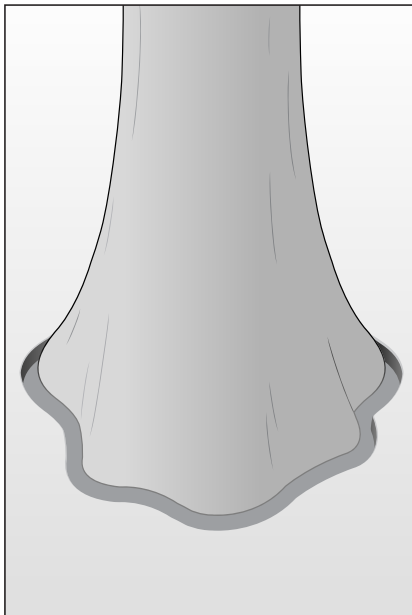
Multi-stem split at or below DBH: For a tree that has multiple stems splitting below DBH, measure the tree at the narrowest point between the root flare and the split.

Stem clusters: For trees that are grown too close together to be treated separately, measure the DBH of each stem and add the measurements together.



⬇ STEP 2

Dig a trench around the base of the tree that's 2-3 inches deep and 4 inches wide. Dig deeper if there is potential for runoff or if the soil is heavy clay or compacted.



⬆ STEP 3

Using the DBH, refer to the product's label to determine how much is needed and follow the label's mixing instructions. Apply the product by pouring it evenly around the tree inside the trench. After the product has been completely absorbed by the soil, firmly replace the excavated soil into the trench.

SOURCE: The Tree Geek, thetreegeek.com

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NEW STUFF

1



2



3



2

CHECK OUT MORE NEW STUFF ONLINE

To stay up to date on all the latest landscape industry products and services, visit LandscapeManagement.net/tag/product-news.

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Spray Equipment

URL: GrahamSE.com

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2. ULTRA SEAL T-10,000 THREAD SEALANT**COMPANY:** Christy's**URL:** TChristy.com

Rated leak-free to pressures as high as 10,000 PSI, this sealant for threaded pipe connections works with both plastic and metal piping systems. It's compatible with copper, galvanized, iron, PVC, nylon and polyethylene fittings and more. It contains virgin PTFE, providing easier connection assembly, according to Christy's. It also contains an anti-galling compound that prevents thread seizing, allowing for easy disassembly of connections.

3. HUNTER PRESSURE REGULATED BODY (PRB)**COMPANY:** Hunter Industries**URL:** HunterIndustries.com

Manufactured for the PGP-04 and I-20 rotors, the Hunter PRB reduces incoming water pressures of 50-100 PSI to 45 PSI. Its rotors help the nozzles operate at peak efficiency, saving up to 25 percent more water, the company says. Having the pressure regulator in the body allows it to remain in place and functional even if the original riser is removed and replaced for service, Hunter says.

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The defensive driver drives with all those things in mind and takes deliberate steps to minimize danger for everyone.

Attitude is the key to defensive driving. Too often, drivers approach the road and think only about their concerns—where they need to be and how long it will take to get there. Defensive driving means an attitude shift that puts safety first—your safety and the safety of everyone around you. It encompasses the way you approach vehicle maintenance, interacting with other vehicles, and accommodating other drivers. It means driving with concern for other people, first and foremost.

When it comes to accident prevention, remember: See, think, do. In every situation, you should be aware of and recognize potential hazards. That could mean

snowy roads, a downed power line or even a drowsy driver in front of you. Understand how to handle specific hazards you might encounter, whether they involve road conditions, other drivers or your own vehicle. Finally, learn to act fast when hazards arise—don't take a wait-and-see approach.

See the hazards. Think about defenses. Do what you need to do and do it fast. This is the foundation of safe driving.

WATCH AND LEARN

Visit LandscapeManagement.net/SafetyWatch to view a defensive driving safety video and use it as a training tool for your team.



SOURCE: LS TRAINING SYSTEM, LSTRaining.COM

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**FRANCHISE
BEST
BUYS**

2016

Buying in

**How did Dan Reid triple sales while
reducing his hours? Franchising.**

Dan Reid
and his team
are two-time
Franchisee of
the Year award
winners.



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Your landscaping customers probably have another problem you can solve.



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"We decided to add a Mosquito Joe division to our lawn business because we knew it would be a perfect fit for our clients. We also saw it as a great opportunity to reach out to more potential lawn care customers through Mosquito Joe. Each business really helps grow the other."

Steve Clark, Mosquito Joe Franchisee (Memphis, TN)



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There are many top franchise lists out there—such as *Entrepreneur's* Franchise 500 and the *Franchise Times* Top 200. But no one has analyzed landscape industry franchise opportunities. Until now.

Rather than doing a list of the biggest franchises, which would overlap with our *LM150* list, we tapped the experts at franchise research firm FranData to dig into the data and determine a list of green industry Franchise Best Buys. Is it debatable? Yes. Will some disagree? Certainly. Is it founded in the data vital to people considering a franchise? Definitely. (Namely, “How likely am I to still be in business in a few years?”) Read on for our ranking, methodology, a look at a franchisee from the top-ranked company and more.

ILLUSTRATION: ©ISTOCK.COM/ALEXSL

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FRANCHISE BEST BUYS



Rank	Franchise Brand
1	The Grounds Guys
2	Weed Man
3	Clean Air Lawn Care
4	U.S. Lawns
5	Scotts LawnService*
6	NaturaLawn of America
7	DryJect
8	Clintar Landscape Management
9	Spring-Green
10	Lawn Doctor

BRAND DETAIL

Brand (alphabetical listing)	Rank	Headquarters	Year Started Franchising	# of Years Franchising	Franchised Units—2014	Company- owned Units—2014	5-Year CAGR	5-Year Compound Continuity Rate	Initial Franchise Fee	Minimum Initial Investment	Maximum Initial Investment	Average Initial Investment	Item 19 Disclosure*	Profit Margin Disclosed?
Clean Air Lawn Care	3	Ft. Collins, Colo.	2007	8	48	5	14%	88.89%	\$25,000	\$60,901	\$117,761	\$89,331	N	N
Clintar Landscape Management	8	Markham, Ontario	2006	9	N/A	N/A	0%	100.00%	\$40,000	\$285,500	\$397,500	\$341,500	Y	N
DryJect	7	Hatboro, Pa.	2001	14	25	0	5%	83.33%	\$19,500	\$33,040	\$169,650	\$101,345	N	N
Grounds Guys, The	1	Waco, Texas	2010	5	154	0	136%	83.24%	\$32,500	\$70,970	\$194,570	\$132,770	N	N
Lawn Doctor	10	Holmdel, N.J.	1967	48	486	0	1%	88.52%	\$89,500	\$81,548	\$99,998	\$90,773	Y	N
NaturaLawn of America	6	Frederick, Md.	1989	26	60	6	0%	95.24%	\$29,500	\$44,500	\$125,000	\$84,750	Y	N
Scotts LawnService*	5	Marysville, Ohio	1998	17	105	87	3%	92.11%	\$30,000	\$94,400	\$314,800	\$204,600	Y	N
Spring-Green	9	Plainfield, Ill.	1977	38	104	26	2%	88.14%	\$30,000	\$89,286	\$103,132	\$96,209	Y	N
U.S. Lawns	4	Orlando, Fla.	1986	29	265	0	5%	79.82%	\$32,000	\$51,500	\$79,300	\$65,400	Y	31.97%
Weed Man	2	Mississauga, Ontario	1976	39	165	0	9%	94.29%	\$20,000	\$68,453	\$85,513	\$76,983	Y	N

*Expected to join TruGreen in 2016. Future franchising status unknown. *See page FB110 for more information on Item 19.

METHODOLOGY

LM tapped research firm FranData to analyze and rank the landscape industry's Franchise Best Buys.

To be eligible for the ranking, brands must have a Franchise Disclosure Document, operate in the U.S. and have a five-year franchising record. Data were considered through 2014. Where applicable, a franchise's Bank Credit Report was factored in. Several dozen outdoor brands were considered for the list.

The ranking is based on a formula that evaluates system performance and support. System performance was determined by scoring demand of a brand and success of existing franchisees. Demand of a brand is determined by growth rate over the most recent five-year period. Success of existing franchisees is evaluated by franchised unit continuity rate over the most recent five-year period.

Support offered by the franchisor is determined by a system's ability and willingness to support franchisees. Ability to support examines the level of disclosure made available to franchisees and lenders, financing assistance and the financial health of a system. Willingness to support examines initial training, pre-opening on-site support, ongoing training, ongoing on-site operational support and the availability of support personnel.

This ranking is intended to be a place for prospective franchisees to start their research. It's not intended to endorse or recommend any franchises.

When considering a franchise, always read the Franchise Disclosure Document. Consult an attorney, accountant and other business advisors when reviewing legal or financial documents.



Dan Reid (left) credits his General Manager Nathan Gonzales (right) with getting him to consider a franchise.

Buying in

The Grounds Guys franchisee Dan Reid has tripled his business—and can now take a day off. BY MARISA PALMIERI

By 2012, Dan Reid was routinely working 60-plus hours a week.

He'd rise at 4:30 a.m. to do invoicing, then work in the field all day and return phone calls after 5 p.m.

"There were months when I worked every day," he says. "There were months when I worked all of daylight."

Reid, 34, formed Morning Star Landscapes in 2003 after landscaping for a friend's dad in high school and attending Bible college.

"I had fun for a few years," he says. "I always enjoyed seeing a project take shape."

Nine years in, he had about 10 employees was grossing \$600,000, but he didn't have a regular paycheck. He always thought things were "just about to turn the corner," but it never got any easier.

His optimism was starting to run out. The husband and father of three young kids says he would have sold the business if he thought he could find a buyer.

Unbeknownst to him, his General Manager Nathan Gonzales put in a phone call to Dwyer Group to learn about its new landscaping franchise brand, The Grounds Guys. He'd previously worked for Mr. Rooter—another one of Dwyer Group's 11 service industry franchise brands. He recognized that Morning Star was held back by its lack of systems.

Gonzales planted the seed, but it took Reid more than a month to call the franchisor himself.

When he finally did, things moved quickly. He spoke with an existing franchisee the next day. The next week, Reid told The Grounds Guys he was ready to come down to its headquarters in Waco, Texas, to learn more. He officially bought in as owner of The Grounds Guys of The Rogue Valley (Ore.) in January 2013—two weeks after his initial contact with a franchise developer.

"I was ready for a change and willing to take a chance because what I was doing wasn't working," he says.

"I could have slowly figured things out, but the franchise was a shortcut. We've done in three years what would have taken me 20—if I would have made it."

Today, he's a two-time winner of The Grounds Guys Franchisee of the Year Award. His revenue has tripled to about \$1.8 million, and his profits have grown tenfold since 2012. What's more, he now typically works 40 hours a week. He took two weeks off in December and recently went on a snowmobiling trip.

"I couldn't do that before," he said. "If I was gone, everything would fall apart."

A GROWING FRANCHISE

The Grounds Guys was founded in Canada as Sunshine Grounds Care in 1987. The company began franchising in 2005. In 2010, Dwyer Group entered into an agreement

to market the franchise in the U.S. under a new brand name—The Grounds Guys—which also was adopted across the Canadian locations. Last year, Dwyer Group acquired The Grounds Guys of Canada.

The brand has had extreme growth—from five units the first year to more than 230 currently, according to President Chris Elmore.

That growth, combined with the success of existing units and the support the franchisor offers its franchisees, earned The Grounds Guys the top spot on the *LM* Franchise Best Buys list (see ranking on page 4).

He attributes the growth to a few things, including the support of parent company Dwyer Group—the holding company for service industry-based franchise brands, including Mr. Electric, Mr. Appliance, Molly Maid and Aire Serv, where Elmore got his start as an HVAC technician.

He also says the company's growth is due to the fragmented nature of the landscape management industry, where so many businesses have revenue less than \$1 million.

"Small business owners are hungry for systems and processes," Elmore says.

Case in point is Dan Reid.

"The amount of hours we were working and the pay—it was a result of not understanding how to run the business," Reid says. "I was good with the technical things, but I was struggling with running a business."

WHAT REID'S LEARNED

Reid's business is about 60 percent landscape installation and about 40 percent maintenance. Each The Grounds Guys franchisee's business looks a little different, he said, noting some in Canada are half snow removal.

"The area The Grounds Guys helped us streamline most has been maintenance," Reid says, adding the

Dan Reid with his wife, Janna, accepting a Franchisee of the Year Award.



DAN REID ON FRANCHISING

Dan Reid, owner of The Grounds Guys of The Rogue Valley is a two-time winner of the franchise's Franchisee of the Year Award. He encourages others to consider a franchise if what they're doing isn't currently working. That was the case for him.

"I really believe in franchising and what we've been able to do has been pretty exciting for me," he says. "The biggest thing is it gives people hope."

If you are considering a franchise, he emphasizes finding a company you click with.

Reid says he felt like The Grounds Guys was a good fit right away. "No one took themselves too seriously and the franchisees were open and willing to help," he says. "Find a company with similar goals."

He said it's also important to remember it's still hard work and requires a big commitment.

"The franchise will give you all the tools, but they won't do anything for you," he says. "You're working just as hard as ever before, but you'll get 10 times the results because you'll be putting your energy in the right places."

Finally, even if you don't go the franchise route, he encourages business owners to compensate for their weaknesses.

Whether it's going back to school or hiring a consultant, you need to recognize the areas where you're weak. "It's often about finding someone who's passionate in that area and working with them," Reid says. "Find help for the things you're not good at."

franchise's software and systems have been key to that progress.

Prior to joining, Reid's maintenance business was only about 15 percent commercial. Today it's about half commercial, half residential. The construction side remains about 90 percent residential.

The first few months in 2013 were a steep learning curve, Reid says. There were many changes to be made, as his franchise consultant connected with key team members and trained them on the new systems.

For example, Reid's office manager was trained on QuickBooks—learning, among other things, how to classify revenue as either construction or maintenance so the team could look at the numbers separately. Gonzales took over the maintenance division and was trained to give estimates using new software.

"I just let the franchise coach our people," says Reid, who hasn't done a maintenance bid in three years. Letting go of many daily functions has been a major step for him—and the growth of the business.

"What's really fueled our growth is the training," he says. "We've been able to increase our capacity so much faster than we could before."

Readymade company resources have been a boon, as well.

For example, hiring went from a haphazard process to a system with a set list of questions to ask and an employee handbook.

"It's all things we knew we had to do before—the handbook, what questions to ask—but it was daunting," Reid says. "It was nice having that provided for us."

Morning start-up is another area where The Grounds Guys processes

have made a difference. Every morning, the lead team member for each division arrives 20 minutes early to meet with the foremen, who make sure their trucks are loaded. Then the whole company huddles at 7 a.m. for a quick talk about what happened yesterday, what's on the schedule for today, a uniform check and to share good news.

"We're trying to get the guys focused on the task at hand: to create a remarkable experience for our customers," Reid says.

He uses one word to describe what the morning looked like before: "disorganized." There were people standing around or employees would show up right before work started, he says. And there was a disconnect between divisions. The maintenance team would show up and do their thing. The construction crew would have a meeting.


"Now we all meet together," he says. "It unifies the team and allows them to see how everything is connected."

And by 7:10, there's not a truck left in the yard.

"That just creates more efficiency, which creates better profits," he says.

Other beneficial systems include a quality process—the GC3—crews use when they arrive on-site and a shut-down process for the end of the day.

As The Grounds Guys of The Rogue Valley grows, Reid's challenge becomes the same as any expanding landscape company—hiring and training.

"We've gotten to the size where we're training salespeople," he says. "Realistically, after I train a salesperson, I won't have a daily function anymore. My job now will be trying to make sure everyone has the tools they need to be successful and to set the vision of the company." 

THE GROUNDS GUYS' 6 FUNDAMENTALS

You can hire a consultant or attend seminars to learn about what makes a successful company, says The Grounds Guys President Chris Elmore. But there's no one to hold you accountable for mastering the basics, like there is in a franchise.



Chris Elmore

"That's why people come to us—not because we have great deals with John Deere, Exmark or Billy Goat," he says. "It's not because we have 230 locations. It's because we focus on building businesses."

Elmore acknowledges The Grounds Guys had "quite a bit of turnover" in the early years. But he says that's under control now, as the company focuses on its six fundamentals. Those include:

- Targeted sales and marketing;
- Operational efficiency;
- Financial awareness;
- Network participation;
- System implementation; and
- Compliance.

Elmore says: "To be one of our successful franchisees, you have to master those six fundamentals."



Emerging OPPORTUNITY

Mosquito control services— and franchises—are on the rise. BY MARISA PALMIERI

In researching outdoor franchise brands, we couldn't ignore mosquito control franchise brands as an emerging trend.

Although brands franchising for fewer than five years were disqualified from the primary *LM* Franchise Best Buys list, we allowed younger brands on the list of mosquito control franchise opportunities. Otherwise, the ranking was determined by the same methodology used for the primary list (see page FBB4).

So what accounts for the rise in mosquito franchise opportunities? Mosquito Joe CEO Kevin Wilson says it's a few things, starting with the ineffectiveness of the "old" way of controlling mosquitoes: the city truck that would spray mosquito control material down the street.

The barrier method—spraying a pyrethroid on foliage around a property's perimeter—is a more effective, targeted approach, he says. Mosquito companies typically treat properties every 21 days from the first sign of mosquitoes until they disappear for the winter. An average spray is about \$70 and the treatments work well, so word spreads quickly, Wilson says.

Plus, awareness of mosquito-borne diseases is high. "It seems like every year we hear about a new disease carried by mosquitoes," Wilson says, citing frequent media coverage of West Nile and Zika viruses.

There are several benefits of adding mosquito control, he says. First, it's a relatively low investment for companies that already have pesticide licenses and equipment. Plus, attracting customers with one service and cross-selling them others has a reciprocal benefit.

But why not just offer it as a new service line versus buying a franchise? Wilson points to estate-planning and exit-strategy benefits. For example, you can sell a franchise as its own business when the time is right.

"If someone wants to get into a fast-growing business where they attract a lot of customers, this is a good one," he says. 🐼

MOSQUITO RANKING

Rank	Franchise Brand
1	The Mosquito Authority
2	Mosquito Squad
3	Mosquito Joe
4	Mosquito Shield



BRAND DETAIL

Brand (alphabetical listing)	Rank	Headquarters	Year Started Franchising	# of Years Franchising	Franchised Units - 2014	Company- owned Units - 2014	5-Year CAGR	5-Year Compound Continuity Rate	Initial Franchise Fee	Minimum Initial Investment	Maximum Initial Investment	Average Initial Investment	Item 19 Disclosure*	Profit Margin Disclosed?
Mosquito Authority, The	1	Hickory, N.C.	2009	6	364	0	46%	100.00%	\$37,500	\$42,850	\$79,200	\$61,025	N	N
Mosquito Joe	3	Virginia Beach, Va.	2012	3	39	1	532%	100.00%	\$20,000	\$62,850	\$125,750	\$94,300	Y	30%
Mosquito Shield	4	N. Attleboro, Mass.	2013	2	27	2	207%	100.00%	\$30,000	\$73,100	\$106,800	\$89,950	N	N
Mosquito Squad	2	Richmond, Va.	2005	10	161	0	29%	87.03%	\$27,500	\$15,850	\$69,625	\$42,738	Y	N

*See page FBB10 for more information on Item 19.

Who makes a **GOOD** **FRANCHISEE?**



Experts weigh in on the requirements for success in owning a franchise.

BY MARISA PALMIERI

With data that show franchise small businesses grow at rates that exceed nonfranchise business growth, according to the International Franchise Association, it may be tempting to consider signing on with a franchise brand.

But franchise experts emphasize this option isn't for everyone.

"It's not a business choice; it's a life choice," says Ken Hutcheson, president of U.S. Lawns, an Orlando, Fla.-based franchisor.

So, how do you know if you'd make a good franchisee? Experts say it comes down to finances, objectives and cultural fit.

DOLLARS AND CENTS

It all starts with finances, says Kim Bonner, owner of New Day Consulting Systems in Washington, D.C. She helps franchisors identify qualified franchisees, among other things.

"Undercapitalization is the No. 1 reason why any business fails," she says. "So if a candidate isn't

comfortable with the initial franchise investment and isn't able to have cash reserves, it's a problem."

Franchisors disclose fees and cash requirements in the Franchise Disclosure Document (FDD).

It's vital to feel comfortable with those figures, says Therese McGroarty, because if you're strapped from the get-go, it's a difficult feat to overcome. She's a consultant with FranNet in Northeast Ohio who also owns several franchises with her husband.

"You need to have enough to sustain the start-up phase and some extra working capital," McGroarty says.

Often, financing is available for the franchise fee and equipment through the franchisors' partners. But a stable financial footing is essential, says Hutcheson.

"If they're struggling today, they need to get their house in order first," he says.

Another financial consideration is to identify your financial goals to see if they align with the brand.

The FDD's Item 19 shares earning potential—how much it's possible to make if you follow the road map (see sidebar on page FBB10).

"That's something to look at and ask, 'Is that figure enough for me?'" McGroarty says.

GOALS AND PERSONALITY

If you're not having success independently, converting your business to a franchise doesn't mean instant profits. Part of the problem might be your strengths

and desires, experts say. Franchises are looking for people with a management mindset, not necessarily those who excel at or want to continue cutting grass, installing landscapes or treating turf.

“We’re looking for someone who will be actively engaged in running their business, not someone who wants to be in the field on a crew,” Hutcheson says.

He says it’s not wrong or bad to want to be a craftsman, technician or “man in the van.” It just may mean you’re not cut out to be a franchisee because you won’t be satisfied managing people and executing sales and marketing plans.

McGroarty agrees. “A lot of times people go into buying a franchise, but they don’t explore what the owner’s role will be,” she says. “It’s very hard to work in the business and continue to be successful. You have to work on your business.”

A necessary characteristic of any franchisee is the ability to follow the system, experts agree.

“It’s already a proven system; there’s no reason to reinvent the wheel,” McGroarty says, noting her firm gives potential franchisees compliance assessments.

THE FDD AND ITEM 19

Under the Franchise Rule enforced by the Federal Trade Commission, franchise prospects must receive a Franchise Disclosure Document (FDD) at least 14 days before you’re asked to sign any contract or pay any money to the franchisor or an affiliate of the franchisor. You have the right to ask for—and get—a copy of the FDD once the franchisor has received your application and agreed to consider it. Indeed, you may want to get a copy of the franchisor’s FDD before you spend any money to investigate the franchise offering. The franchisor may give you a copy of its FDD on paper, via email, through a web page or on a disc.

The FDD includes 23 numbered items. Item 19 contains claims the franchisor chooses to make about the sales or earnings of its franchises. The Franchise Rule doesn’t require a franchisor to provide sales or earnings information, but many do. Any claims the franchisor makes about sales, income or profits must be in Item 19.

SOURCE: FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

Bonner agrees. “If you’re a hard-core entrepreneur and you have a problem with structure, you probably don’t want to invest in a franchise,” she says.

On the other hand, great franchisees don’t expect the franchise to do everything for them.

“They’re giving you a model and a system that you, yourself, have to work,” Bonner says. “You can’t expect your franchise to do your marketing, your sales or delegate and manage for you. This is your business.”

CULTURAL FIT

A key component of evaluating a franchise opportunity is considering the company’s culture and whether you’d be a good fit, experts say.

“It’s kind of like a marriage, and you want to marry someone you like,” McGroarty says.

Pay attention to every interaction you have with the brand—including email exchanges, phone calls and in-person meetings with everyone from the company.

“It’s not sufficient for you to base your evaluation on the discovery day,” Bonner says, referring to the open house or on-site meeting at the franchisor’s headquarters. “That’s a foolish decision because it’s a well-orchestrated event. But culture is day in and day out.”

Aside from your interactions with the corporate staff, it’s vital to question current and former franchisees. Contact information for both groups is included on the FDD.

McGroarty recommends contacting about a dozen franchisees.


“Those are the people who are going to tell you the truth about the business,” she says.

For that reason, Hutcheson encourages prospects to contact other franchisees early in the process.

It’s a bad sign if the existing franchisees won’t get back to you or are negative about their experiences, Bonner says.

“If people aren’t answering emails or phone calls or if you reach them and it’s cold, aloof or off-putting, that’s a serious red flag,” she says.

Hutcheson says the question comes down to, “Is this a good fit for me?”

“It’s not whether a franchise is good or bad, it’s whether the franchise fits your goal,” he says. “Just make sure the model will deliver what you want from both a personal and financial standpoint.” 

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

10 key questions from the International Franchise Association.

While there are many examples of successful franchises, buying a franchise is no guarantee of success. Before buying a franchise, carefully and thoughtfully answer these 10 important questions.

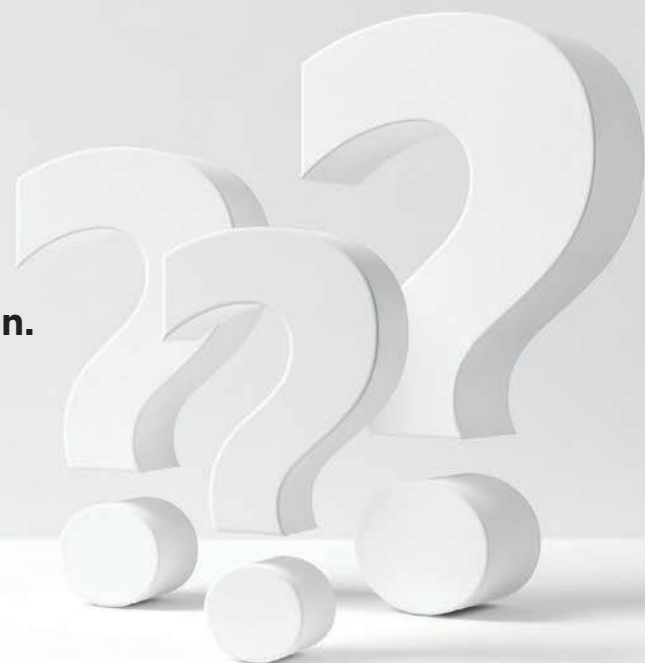
1 Are you willing and able to take on the responsibilities of managing your own business? Some careful self-analysis is important before buying a franchise. Indeed, your personal house should be in good order. One myth is that franchise ownership is easy. That's simply not true. While the franchise system will give the start-up training and offer ongoing support, you, the franchisee, must be prepared to manage the business. While some franchises may lend themselves to absentee ownership, most are best run by hands-on management. You must be willing to work harder than you have perhaps ever worked before. Forty-hour weeks are also a myth, particularly in the start-up phase of the business. It's more like 60-to-70-hour weeks.

2 Will you enjoy the franchise? Sometimes people buy a franchise they think will make them a lot of money, only to find later they don't enjoy the business. The adage "know thyself" certainly applies here. You should buy a franchise that centers on an area you will enjoy for the next 10-15 years.

3 Are you willing to completely follow the franchise system? The key to franchising success is the product and service consistency customers find from one franchise to another. When you display the sign and logo of a franchise, you're indicating to customers that you follow a particular system. People who are extremely entrepreneurial and do not like to conform to a predetermined formula should be careful about buying a franchise.

4 Do you have a history of success in dealing and interacting with people? Your ability to interact well with your franchisor, other franchisees, your employees and your customers cannot be emphasized enough. A negative, critical franchise owner can be a detriment to the entire franchise system. You must have a track record of good relationships with employers, supervisors and fellow employees.

5 Can you afford the franchise? One of the major causes of business failure is undercapitalization. While the franchisor will be able to give you a good idea of the start-up costs, sometimes these figures will vary due to leasehold improvement needs and other valuables. You will need enough money not only to open your franchise but to run it until it's profitable. For some franchises, that may take a year. Remember, it's better to start out with more money than you think you'll need.



6 Have you carefully studied the legal documents? Franchisors are required to prepare a document called the Franchise Disclosure Document. It gives you pertinent information about the franchise. It also contains the franchise agreement you'll sign. This agreement will govern your relationship with the franchisor for the term of the contract. The disclosure document is a vital document. It should be studied carefully and discussed with your lawyer.

7 Does the franchise you're considering have a track record of success? Get to know the principal directors of the company—their business background and how profitable their franchise has been. Have an accountant review the financial analysis of the franchise. Is it a solid company? Also, examine how long the franchise has been in business. A startup franchise may offer the opportunity to get in on the ground floor. But the franchisor also might not have sufficient experience to fully develop the system.

8 Are the franchisees generally happy and successful? The FDD will contain a listing of all the franchise owners. It's worth your time to contact a number of them to discuss their experiences with the franchise. Has the franchisor followed through on commitments? Did the franchisees receive adequate training? Would they buy the franchise again? Is the business profitable? What advice would they give you?

9 Do you like the franchisor's staff? One of the most important elements of a franchise is the ongoing support and contact you'll have with the franchisor. For this reason, you should feel comfortable with the people you'll interact with for a number of years.

10 Do you have a support system? Managing a franchise is a full-time job. It requires great sacrifices of personal and family time. For this reason, your friends and family should understand that you'll have tremendous demands on your time.

SOURCE: INTERNATIONAL FRANCHISE ASSOCIATION

Mosquito Joe



Outside is fun again.

With public demand for eliminating harmful mosquitoes, ticks and other outdoor pests on the rise, and mosquito-borne illnesses making daily headlines, Mosquito Joe is a franchise opportunity with a great promise: *making outside fun again for communities throughout the United States.*

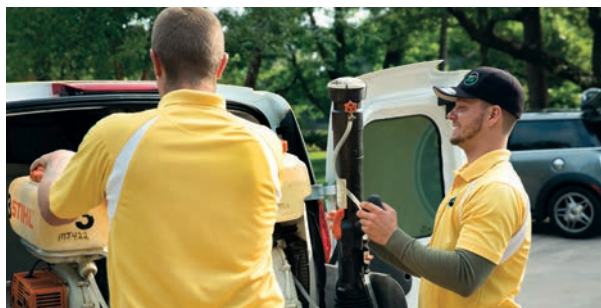


Mosquito Joe services provide reprieve from the nuisance of outdoor pests and peace of mind for residential and commercial customers. The simple business

model makes it great as a stand-alone business but also a natural complement to a lawn or landscape business. Mosquito Joe brings powerful branding, proven systems, and full training and support from an experienced team with over 100 combined years of franchise experience.

Benefits of adding a Mosquito Joe franchise to your portfolio include:

- **Unit Economics.** A low investment and high gross margins, coupled with effective customer recruitment means a faster period to breakeven.



“Everyone can go out and mow grass, mulch, trim, etc. but adding Mosquito Joe set us apart from all the other companies in our area. How fast Mosquito Joe is growing says a lot, leaving the other spray companies behind.”

—ZACH HOBGOOD, LANDSCAPE BUSINESS OWNER AND MOSQUITO JOE FRANCHISEE, OWENSBORO, KY

- **Fast Growing Market.** Mosquito termination is a small, fast growing and very fragmented segment in the pest control industry.
- **Recurring Revenue Model.** Our customers love the service we provide every 21 days, driving strong customer retention and a high lifetime value per customer.
- **Outstanding Leverage.** A Mosquito Joe franchise helps you leverage your existing company overhead, retain good employees, and maximize the value of your current customer base.
- **A New Brand.** Offering an alternative brand in your market allows you to recruit new customers (outside your existing core customers), some of whom could be converted to your lawn or landscape business. Additionally, you now have two distinct companies with stand-alone value that can be monetized.

In just three years of franchising Mosquito Joe has become a renowned leader in the mosquito control industry, with over 100 franchisees, 225 units sold, and locations operating across 27 states. Recognized by Entrepreneur Magazine among the *Top New Franchises* and *Fastest Growing Franchises*, the company continues to garner attention as a great franchise opportunity.

Owning a Mosquito Joe franchise is perfect for anyone with strong customer service skills and a desire to make a difference in their community. Start making outside fun again in your community!

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When asked about his company's success and continual growth, NaturaLawn® of America's President and Founder Phil Catron stated, "We couldn't be where we are today without the tireless efforts of our home office staff, our hard working franchisees, and most importantly,



all of our customers who continue to choose a safer alternative to traditional lawn care, year after year."

The overall success of the NaturaLawn® of America system comes from their focus on customer service. This ideal is ingrained in every employee at NaturaLawn of America and is something which is taught on day one with their 'two scoop service'. "The two scoop service," explains Phil Catron, "is the understanding and belief that it is our responsibility, and duty, to not only give customers more than what they paid for, but also more than what they expect, or deserve."

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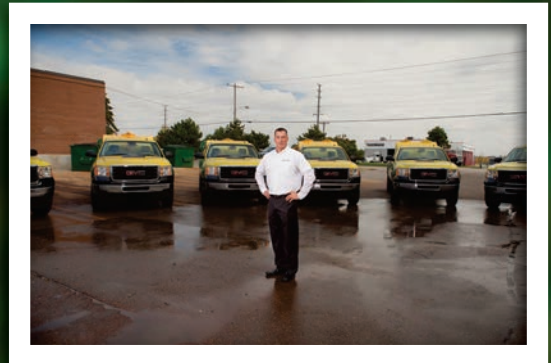
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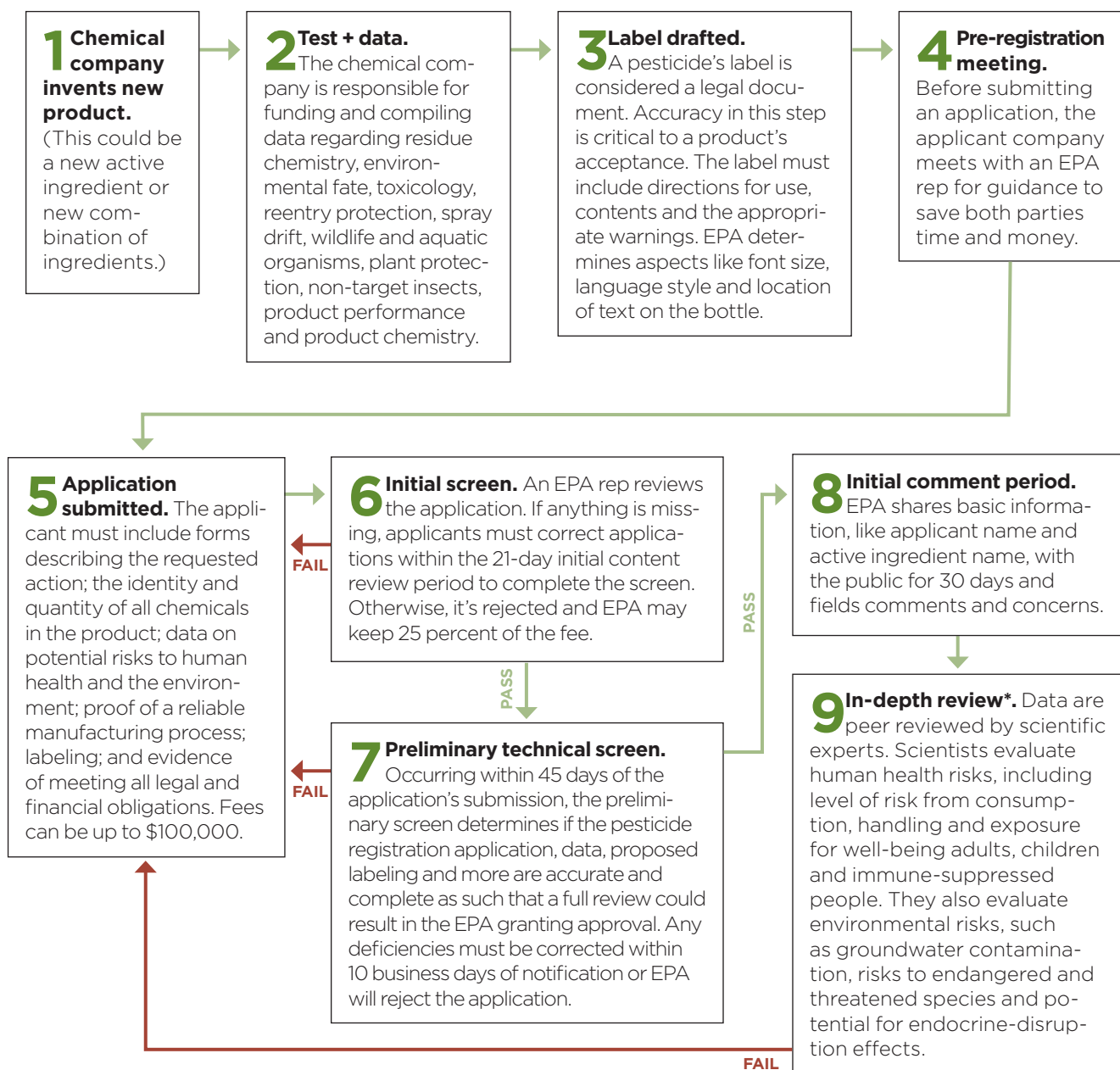
► PAGE 42



Seeking approval

See how pesticides make their way through the EPA-approval process. **BY DILLON STEWART**

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulates pesticides through a stringent process. It can take chemical companies many months or years before they're permitted to sell their products. Here's how it works.



10 Final 30-day comment period. The EPA publishes risk assessment and proposed decision documents. Then, it accepts public comment and petition, analyzes the comments received, revises its decision, if necessary, and prepares a response-to-comment document.

11 Notice of issuance. If no changes are needed or if the applicant accepts modifications, a notice of issuance is published in the Federal Register.

12 Pesticide approved for sale.

***Conditional registration.** A pesticide may avoid portions of the process if the EPA determines that the applicant didn't have sufficient time to generate the required data because not enough time has passed since the data requirement was imposed; the use of the pesticide during this time will not cause any unreasonable adverse effect on the environment; and the use of the pesticide is in the public interest, such as to prevent a disease outbreak. A 2013 Natural Resources Defense Council report found that nearly 65 percent of pesticides are approved this way. Critics call the process a loophole that allows under-analyzed pesticides to be sold.

SOURCE: EPA SPOKESPERSON; EPA DOCUMENTS

NEWSPEED

NEW AERATORS

Classen unveiled a new stand-on aerator, the Classen PRO SA30 Stand-Aer. It's part of the manufacturer's new PRO product line for professional landscapers and rental centers. It features a 15-hp Kawasaki engine, a 5-gal. fuel tank and vibration absorbers. Classen also released the TA18 compact aerator, which is 27.2-in. wide and can aerate at speeds up to 4.2 mph. Both units have a two-year commercial warranties.



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Power in a repower?

As equipment becomes more flexible, we look at the pros and cons of repowering commercial mowers. BY DILLON STEWART

Repowering a mower—swapping the equipment's original engine with a replacement one—may be fading in popularity among large landscape companies. Still, some small and mid-size contractors are finding substantial savings from breathing new life into mowers.

Wayne Russel, director of distributor service support at Briggs & Stratton, has watched the engine replacement market change over the past 20 years. It has diminished, as now nearly a third of landscape companies lease their equipment, Russel estimates.

In addition to lease programs, Russel says, many companies have moved to structured equipment replacement programs, where they work with

their dealers to decide a replacement date upon purchase, so they're always running new equipment.

Mark Hopkins, located near Dallas, is the regional vice president for Frederick, Md.-based LandCare—a full-service company bringing in around \$200 million a year from mostly commercial maintenance work. Eight years ago, he implemented a 24-month rotation for the company's larger mowers, 36 inches and above.

"We've found it to be more effective overall, not just from the cost standpoint or the upkeep standpoint but also from the standpoint of productivity and the reduction of lost field time," Hopkins says.

He says it's tough to put a number on the savings, but he believes this



INDUSTRY TREND
Some large firms are moving towards leasing or structured replacement plans.

structure is most cost effective for his business, which doesn't have on-staff mechanics.

"There's a real cost for mechanics," Hopkins says. "There's a real cost with the overhead associated with a shop, and there's a real cost for downtime. So there's more of a front-end cost of running an operation this way, but I think there can be an overall savings."

With mowers always less than two years old, they rarely need more than preventive maintenance, and Hopkins rarely has to worry about downtime. Any issues that arise are either covered by warranty or caused by operator error—which is a training issue, not a fleet management issue. More than peace of mind, though, always having new equipment bolsters customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction and employee productivity, Hopkins says.

"There's an intangible value that comes from the perception of employees who are running a machine that's one or two years old, as opposed to a machine that's 10 years old," Hopkins says. "There can also be a value perceived by your clients."

THE CASE FOR REPOWERING

That being said, it's a good time for companies who want to repower equipment to do so—especially considering the potential for flexibility and savings. Due to mower manufacturer demand, most engine makers now share a "plug and play" mentality, says Rassel. This approach makes it easier than ever to replace engines. Standardization and

flexibility for the end-user are now industry standards.

"It used to be a Kawasaki had to be replaced by a Kawasaki, but that's not the way the industry is anymore," he says. "Now it can be replaced with a Kohler or a Briggs."

A1 Lawn & Landscape in Anchorage, Alaska, is a \$2 million, full-service company that's making the most out of its equipment. It keeps a full-time staff of three mechanics year-round. During the winter, the mechanics are tasked with getting each mower in the fleet as close to 100 percent as possible.

When Ted Pendagast, A1's maintenance manager, was debating whether to repower or replace 10 Honda HRC216 commercial hydrostatic walk-behind mowers, he consulted his on-staff small engine specialist, Naser Warmilee. Warmilee said he could repower them for half the price.

It was less than that. Honda HRC216s retail at \$1,200 or approximately \$12,000 to replace all of them. Warmilee had all 10 Hondas up and running for \$3,500 in parts plus labor—an \$8,500 savings.

As the mowers get larger, so do the savings. Plus, today's contractor can personalize a repower solution tailored to his or her operation, Rassel says.

A commercial ZTR can cost upwards of \$6,000 dollars—sometimes more. Rassel says a common situation in which a replacement engine customer finds himself or herself is an engine malfunction in the early stages of a mower's life span. This scenario is often the result of improper maintenance and may not

NEWSFEED

YARDOGRAPHICS

OmniEarth released Yardographics, which identifies, categorizes and analyzes property

attributes and landscape features within geographic areas. It's designed to help companies better target

GRAVELY ZTRS

Expanding its Pro-Turn series, Gravely added the 72-in. X-factor II deck and a 60-in. deck option

for the Gravely ZT XL prosumer line of zero-turn mowers. The X-Factor II 72-in. deck is available on the Gravely Pro-Turn 200 and 400 series of commercial zero-turn mowers.

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be covered by warranty. If you haven't put many hours on the machine, that investment might be too large to scrap.

In this case, a more affordable move would be replacing the original engine. At \$1,700, a Briggs & Stratton electronic-fuel-injection (EFI) engine costs about \$400 more than a standard engine. However, a contractor who runs a mower with an EFI engine for more than 500 hours per season could save about \$500 a year, depending on gas prices, Russel says. Just by repowering instead of replacing the mower, the contractor is saving more than \$4,000 on just one machine, and if the EFI engine does what it's supposed to, the savings can be even greater. That type of option didn't exist just a few years ago.

On the other hand, a standard carburetor engine can help breathe new

life into a mower that's on its last leg. A contractor who's put 2,500 hours on a mower in three years may need a new engine, but the deck and other components may be in decent shape. The contractor knows the mower won't last another 2,500 hours, even with a new engine. That may not be enough time to reap the benefits of an EFI engine, but he or she can use a standard carburetor engine to stretch the mower's life span another 1,000 hours, or two more seasons. Plus, a new engine comes with a new warranty, Russel says.

That's just the tip of the personalization iceberg. Options include upgraded cyclonic air filters, solenoid starters or a low oil shut-down feature, just to name a few. It's all part of the engine manufacturers' efforts towards personalization in the end-user experience.



MACHINIST
Small engine specialist Naser Warmilee keeps A1 Lawn & Landscape up and running.


"That's where this business has gone," Russel says. "There's a financial decision they've got to make that best fits that piece of equipment and its life expectancy."

Like Hopkins says about his equipment rotation program, Pendagast has found having a full-time staff of mechanics has its own intangible benefits. For one, it allows him to remove one of the many hats he was wearing by letting the mechanics focus on the equipment. He's always confident he'll go into the spring with a full high-performing fleet.

Plus, his mechanics can maintain and fix any piece of equipment A1 has a problem with. The flexibility that comes with that perk lets Pendagast keep his eye out for used equipment. Sometimes used equipment just needs to fall into the right hands to get up and running again.

"When you learn the idiosyncrasies with what's going wrong with them, you can find used machines for cheap because people are fed up with them," he says. "People have been tinkering around and spending money, but they don't know what they're doing so they haven't gotten any results."

Like many things in the green industry, there isn't a silver bullet. It's all about personalizing the decision to fit your operation and finances. Even Hopkins acknowledges what works for his firm would not work for every operation.

"It's a difference in business philosophy," Hopkins says. "There are costs associated with either model. It's just understanding what your business is and what your costs are." 



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Under cover

Tented projects allow companies to work through winter weather and retain their talent during the off-season. BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER

At Greencare Landscape Management, the work doesn't stop just because it's winter. Instead, crews at the Scarborough, Maine-based company pitch a tent on the client's property and keep on going. Jeffrey Chakirelis says this approach to working through the elements helps keep revenue flowing during the off-season, prevents employee layoffs and helps the company get a head start on spring projects.

"Instead of just sitting back, throwing our feet up and waiting for snow, we can still be doing things out in the field," says Chakirelis, the company's graduate landscape architect. "Yes, it takes more time to do it this way, but, to us, it's worth it to keep our core people and to keep moving."

Greencare Landscape Management is a \$2 million to \$3 million company that offers 70 percent design/build and 30 percent maintenance services to an 80 percent residential, 20 percent commercial clientele. Chakirelis says the process

of tenting winter projects has allowed the company to extend the working season, alleviate any fall backlog, and keep its skilled stonemasons on staff year-round. Most of the company's winter projects involve stonework that can be done under the defined space of the tent, such as building masonry walls, fireplaces and outdoor kitchens. Bigger jobs, such as laying pavers and constructing patios, are too large to cover with a tent, Chakirelis says. The company plans ahead and prepares for its winter projects by laying the concrete bases during warmer weather and covering them with thermal blankets to protect them from frost until the stonework begins.

"We know that winter is coming, so we winterize the sites by doing some of the excavation prior to the winter," Chakirelis says. "When we erect the tents and put the heaters in there, the base is already in place so we can start moving forward on our structures."

Each winter, the company has two to three tented jobs going at any

given time. But these jobs have to meet certain criteria to be worth the extra effort involved with tented work, Chakirelis says. Most of Greencare's winter projects are worth \$10,000 or more. The location also has to be conducive to erecting the tent and accessible to crews and machinery. For example, Chakirelis says a job right on the lakefront in the middle of winter would likely have too many variables to be considered for a tent, and he would advise that client to wait until spring.

"The margins are as good as doing the job in the summer, but the idea is to keep everyone busy, keep our core people and have another source of revenue during the winter," Chakirelis says, adding that the company also does nontented projects during the winter, such as installing indoor fireplaces.

Greencare Landscape Management owns its tents, which are made of a special plastic that absorbs sunlight and retains heat. Chakirelis says it takes three guys about half a day to erect a tent using the company's systematic approach to building the frame, which involves creating gables at each end to allow snow and rain to roll off. As long as the tents are set up, taken down and stored properly, they typically last about three seasons. Crews also add two portable kerosene torpedo heaters inside each tent to keep workers warm and to keep materials at an even, controlled temperature. Depending on the size of the tent, Chakirelis says the company usually adds 5 percent to the cost of the project.

Because of the extra costs associated with winter projects, Chakirelis says most clients are willing to wait



NEWSFEED

GOODBYE, CHUCK

Charles Vander Kooi—construction and landscape consultant, principal of Vander Kooi & Associates and founder of HardScape Magazine—died of an apparent heart attack in March. He was 68.

JCB ADDS PILOT CONTROLS

JCB's entry-level, 14-ft. backhoe loader is now available with pilot controls. The addition of pilot controls allows operators to seamlessly change from excavator operations to backhoe operations, the manufacturer says.

CAT UPDATES EXCAVATOR

Cat's 308E2 mini hydraulic excavator is now available in a variable-angle-boom configuration, which extends its maximum reach by 30 inches to a total of 306 inches. The dump clearance is also extended by 56 inches to 239 inches.



← PITCHING A TENT

Davis Landscape Co. shares an example of a tented project in progress (left), and the finished product.

until spring to get started. Eager clients are often sold on the idea of having the bulk of their project completed during the winter months, he says, so they can begin to enjoy their new outdoor space as soon as the weather breaks.

"Let's face it, our industry is not a necessity. It's more of a luxury. So people are anxious to get their projects done," Chakirelis says. "I don't have too much trouble with customers who want their project completed early so they can enjoy it sooner. We have found that offering winter work is a good avenue to close the deal and keep moving."

ANOTHER TAKE

Davis Landscape Co. in Lisbon, Maine, also uses tents to work through winter. Gary Booker, the company's hardscapes manager, has worked as a mason for nearly 40 years and brought the process with him when he came to Davis Landscape 20 years ago. The full-service company, which has a half

residential, half commercial clientele, doesn't seek out this kind of winter work, but it will do it for the right clients when necessary. For example, a regional medical center needed a stone sign installed and invoiced before the end of 2015 for budgetary reasons, so Booker and his crews tented the project and worked through the elements to complete it on time.


"That was a special circumstance, but there are clients you will do that for," Booker says. "Clients realize that there will be extra costs—and they are not overly impressed with the idea—but that's the result of wanting the project done at that point."

Booker says a tent can add about three days to a project, so Davis Landscape adds an extra 10-20 percent to the cost of tented jobs, which require heating the tent's interior to 40 degrees F, the minimum temperature required when working with mortar. The company also charges clients for the costs of renting the portable heaters and providing the heat. Because of these upcharges, Booker says most of the company's tented jobs are done for residential customers who can afford the extra fees and are anxious

to have their projects completed. Commercial customers, on the other hand, are typically working with set budgets.

"The price tag that goes with winter work is a bit more substantial, so you can usually talk people into waiting until spring or summer," Booker says. "But some just don't want to wait and, in that case, we go through and estimate the job."

Booker says contractors who are considering tented work should take the time to carefully estimate the job to ensure it's profitable. He also says winter work isn't for everyone. A lot of his guys look forward to a little time off at the end of the year to rejuvenate themselves for the busy spring season. Those who are interested in working through the winter also have the option to help Davis Landscape's owner renovate houses, which Booker says can be a more dependable source of income than relying on landscape design/build work during the winter.

"We go real hard in the spring. We have boots on the ground the minute spring hits, and we're going for all we're worth as long as we can into November," Booker says. "Once it starts getting colder, the guys are getting tired. It is helpful to keep guys on staff with winter work, but most of the guys here look forward to the layoff to rest their bodies a little bit." 

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Charlotte, N.C.

PHOTOS: DAVIS LANDSCAPE CO.



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BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER

Alan Garcia doesn't like the term "upselling." Instead, the president and owner of Fort Worth Lawn Sprinkler Co. says "added value" better describes what his company has to offer. Because for Garcia, it's not about selling services his clients don't want or need. It's about providing them the right services to make sure they love their lawn.

"We are not a transaction-based company, we are a relationship-based company," Garcia says. "We just happen to sell sprinklers."

For more than 40 years, these relationships have been the backbone of Fort Worth Lawn Sprinkler Co.. The \$2 million business has been serving clients in Fort Worth, Texas, since 1975, offering irrigation system installation and maintenance services to a 70-percent residential, 30-percent commercial clientele.

Many clients and employees have been with the company since its earliest days. Garcia says longevity has



40-PLUS
The Fort Worth Lawn Sprinkler Co. flag has been flying since 1975.

been the key to the company's success.

"We are really a family, and we all enjoy coming to work every day," he says.

In the mid-1970s, Garcia's father-in-law, Price Hulsey, worked as a business broker and was trying to find a buyer for one of his clients who owned a small irrigation company in Arlington, Texas. After "listening to the spiel over and over again," Hulsey decided to buy the company himself, even though Garcia says he knew nothing about irrigation.

"He didn't know a sprinkler head from a valve and he still bought it," Garcia says. "But he quickly learned the business and what he needed to do to make it better."

Hulsey soon relocated the company to Fort Worth. Garcia joined the company in 2003 as a sales representative, with

Continued on page 44

NEWSFEED

NEW TRENCHERS

Ditch Witch unveiled a new line of walk-behind trenchers. The six

models—including the C12, C14, C16, C16X, C24X and the C30X trenchers—dig at

depths between 24 inches and 48 inches.

CONTROLLER UPDATE

Rachio launched Generation 2, a new version of its

sprinkler controller. The cloud-based and Wi-Fi-connected controller can water up to 16 zones. Rachio lowered its MSRP to \$249.

PHOTO: FORT WORTH LAWN SPRINKLER CO.

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IRRIGATION+WATER MANAGEMENT

Continued from page 42

the intent to one day buy the company and take over the family business.

Working closely with the company's accountant, attorney and bank, Garcia officially purchased Fort Worth Lawn Sprinkler Co. in 2012. Hulsey had been transitioning responsibilities to Garcia for several years. Garcia says, jokingly, that the most visible change that took place after the transition was his move from a desk in the common office space into an office with a door.

"I think our transition was made a lot easier because I worked with these guys for

so long before they started working for me," Garcia says. "I brought some new energy and efficiency to the company, but I didn't want to change things just to change them. I wanted to improve where things needed improved."

GRADUAL IMPROVEMENTS

One of the first changes Garcia made was upgrading the company's decade-old Microsoft Access database. He hired a web developer to build a custom one that manages all the scheduling and reports. Technicians can access all the information they need from the field using iPads. The technol-

ogy has simplified rerouting technicians, sending monthly invoices and more. The improvements have increased the company's billable versus working hours by about 20 percent.

"It takes all of our human time out of doing any kind of calculations, which has saved us a ton of time in the office and in the field," Garcia says. "It's all done with the click of a mouse."

Along with a new website and a marketing redesign,

Garcia says the company's growth has "evolved kind of naturally." He doesn't spend any money on advertising. Instead, he focuses on retaining his existing clients and offering them other services, such as landscape lighting, drainage and pot irrigation.

Garcia established a small monetary incentive to encourage his team to inform clients about the company's other offerings and provide them with tip sheets on services that may interest them. Staff



PHOTO: FORT WORTH LAWN SPRINKLER CO.

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IN HIS SHOES

Alan Garcia (right), owner of Fort Worth Lawn Sprinkler Co., took over the business from his father-in-law Price Hulsey in 2012.

at Fort Worth Lawn Sprinkler are paid an hourly rate plus a flat percentage of the jobs they perform, so Garcia says it's in everyone's best interest to educate clients on these additional services and sell more jobs.

"The incentive was to get them comfortable visiting with customers instead of just handing them the bill and walking away," Garcia says. "But what really motivated them was when a tech gives a client a tip sheet on lighting and the client orders the service, that tech gets to do the job (and make a percentage on it) for telling them about the lighting."

DEALING WITH THE WEATHER

The weather also has opened up new opportunities. In 2012, the city of Fort Worth implemented year-round water use restrictions that limited watering to twice a week for both residential and commercial properties and mandated that no water should be wasted due to runoff or malfunctioning sprinklers. Garcia says that move prompted an increase in requests for upgrades and drip irrigation from existing clients, plus requests for new systems from homeowners who would have difficulty manually watering on their designated days. The company also started offering water audits that include a site inspection and suggestions for system repairs and revisions.

Regardless if the weather is wet or dry, hot or cold, employees at Fort Worth Lawn Sprinkler never have to worry about the industry's standard seasonal layoffs. Since the beginning, the company has never laid off an employee, and Garcia says it never will. One way the company survives fully staffed through slow times is its voluntary employee savings program. From January to November, the company takes \$30 out of all participating employees' weekly paychecks and matches it. The money is set aside and then given to each employee during a company potluck meal the Wednesday before Thanksgiving. While the program is optional, Garcia says every employee participates.

"When we are dead slow, I'm handing out checks," he says. "It's their money, but we've been helping them save it and also adding to it. It's an extra \$1,400, and it's a huge help during the lean winter months."

Going forward, Garcia sees the biggest opportunities for growth on the system maintenance side of the business.

Continued on page 55

Opportunity lies in irrigation maintenance, Alan Garcia says.



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NEW TRICKS

Learn how to improve your business blog with Shaun Kanary's strategies for brainstorming topic ideas and post styles.

 **PAGE 50**

10 commandments of hiring + retention



BY MEL KLEIMAN

The author is the founder of Humetrics. He helps companies build high-quality, frontline, hourly workforces. Reach him at mkleiman@humetrics.com.

1 Thou shalt commit thyself to hiring and retaining only the best. Great companies are great employers, in turn, who are able to hire great people. Mediocre employees breed mediocrity, so make sure you recruit and select only the best. If a position goes unfilled for a while, you're better off than if you settle for a new employee who doesn't measure up to your highest standards.

2 Thou shalt not be influenced by dazzling answers and false appearances. Applicants are generally better prepared for the interview than most employers are. They've practiced pat answers to your run-of-the-mill interview questions, and they may know how to dress to impress. It's your job to dig deeper. There are only two sources of information about every job applicant: the applicant and the people who know the applicant. Skill and attitude testing are good measures of strengths and weaknesses. Also effective are the candidate's references, coworkers and friends. Talk to these people to verify what the applicant tells you and to learn even more.

3 Thou shalt know what thy is looking for. A detailed job description is essential. This includes the responsibilities of the position and the skills, aptitudes, abilities, and, most importantly, attitudes needed to be successful.

4 Thou shalt take a marketing approach to recruiting. Recruiting is an on-going process. You should recruit new employees in the same way you recruit new customers: consistently and proactively.



5 Thou shalt capitalize on referrals and rehires and pay attention to retention. First and foremost, you want to recruit the best and then retain them. Referrals from current employees and re-recruiting former quality employees are the best sources of recruits. When you have a great employee, do everything possible to retain that person. If you do lose great employees, keep in contact with them as future rehires.


6 Thou shalt not be limiting nor discriminatory. The job market is changing and you must change your perceptions and attitudes along with it. Don't look only for the young or people who have always been in your industry. It pays far greater dividends to hire people with great attitudes rather than for their experience, education or skills.

7 Thou shalt never stop looking for thy next great employee. If someone gives you good customer service, ask if they are interested in working for you. When you stop at the bank, go to the grocery store or pay the kid down the street to mow your lawn: Ask yourself, "Could this person succeed in my company?" You've already witnessed his work ethic. You owe it to yourself to at least ask.

8 Thou shalt make the new hire's first day the best day. First impressions are lasting. The extra care and time you spend making the new hire welcome and comfortable will be richly rewarded by the hiring gods. When your new hire returns home at the end of the first workday, a friend or family member will most certainly ask: "How's the new job?" The answer needs to be: "Fantastic. What a great company. I can't wait to go back tomorrow."

9 Thou shalt set high standards and hold thyself and thy employees accountable. You shall be clear from the get-go about values, mission and responsibilities. Your employees will know and understand why their jobs are important and exactly what's expected of them so they can meet your standards and be stunningly successful.

10 Thou shalt honor thy employees and treat them well. Employers often forget that employees represent more than a "one-time sale." These "chosen ones" are the organization's inner sphere of influence. They can raise the perceived value of your company or they can speak negatively and undermine your reputation. They are the reason customers come back as well as why new customers come to you. They can refer potential team members or they can scare prospects away. Simply put: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

If you follow these rules and remain focused and committed to hiring the best, you soon will see that your organization becomes just that—the best. 

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Teach your old blog some new tricks



BY SHAUN KANARY

The author is director of marketing for Weed Pro in Sheffield Village, Ohio, and adjunct professor of marketing at Baldwin Wallace University.

We've all heard the statistics that support the business benefits of having a blog on your website. According to a study by Content Crossroads, small businesses with blogs generate 126 percent more leads. Here I'll break down why blogs work so well and provide ideas for taking the hard work out of this marketing method.

WHY DO BLOGS WORK?

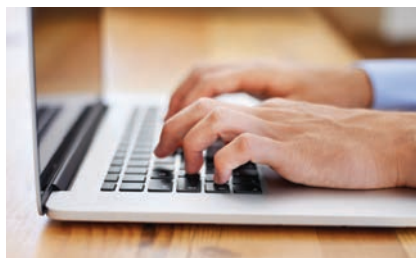
Some of you may be asking why your blog *doesn't* work for your business. We'll get back to that later. The idea that supports writing more blog articles is simple. As you write more posts, the number of pages on your site increases, meaning it's more likely to be found by customers using Google to search for solutions you offer.

But back to that earlier question: You've been blogging and it's just not equaling more leads or traffic. What gives? Well, you're probably blogging about things you care about—not what your customers care about or are looking for.

IDEAS FOR BLOG TOPICS

Now that we've established that blogging is important, and blogging about the right things is even more important, how do you know what to blog about? The simple answer is, "What your customers ask and say." Here are some tips for collecting that information:

- Have your customer service reps keep note pads near them to write down customer questions. It's a great way to come up with topics to write about, in your consumer's own words. Reward your staff for the number of questions they come up with.



- Use tools such as the Google Adwords Keyword Planner to find popular Google searches when it comes to your industry. This is a great way to create content that people are looking for in searches on Google.
- Use Google Forms to create quick customer surveys. The results allow you to gather data and ideas for future blog articles.
- Compliments from customers can be turned into easy articles for your blog. Best yet, consumers who are reviewing which company they should work with for their projects love these articles.


IDEAS FOR POST TYPES

Now that you know the topics you need to write about, the hard part is finding time to sit down and write the actual article. Well, you don't have to be Ernest Hemingway to quickly create good blog articles. The best blog posts are around 600 words and can be consumed in bite-size pieces. Don't write a novel; get to the point and be entertaining. Here are four blog post styles that are easy to produce and quick to write.

- **FAQ and react.** FAQ posts are very easy to produce. Take your most asked questions and answer them in a post.
- **Q&A interviews.** Kind words from customers are great to receive. They're even better to show to other

consumers. Develop five or six questions to ask people who call in to share their delight about your service, and have them respond. What drove them to give your company a try? What was dealing with your employees like? What was the outcome of your work? These types of questions make for a great article, and they're a highly searched for topic on the Internet.

- **Curation.** Curation is perhaps the easiest blog type to write. It's the "movie review" format that people often use in their blog article. Here's how you do it: First, find a piece of information on the web you agree or disagree with. Then summarize it in no more than 80 words and provide a hyperlink to the original article. Finally, provide your feedback on this article and why you agree with it or not. The best curation articles often revolve around relevant topics that are being talked about at the present moment. Tools like BuzzSumo.com can help you find the most popular topics and articles.
- **Infographics.** These colorful, image-centric blog posts can help you explain difficult or boring subjects in a fun way. Infographics may seem tough to produce; however, free tools, like one from Hubspot (buff.ly/1Rjy1qs) show you how to create infographics in PowerPoint.

While a blog may seem like a difficult proposition, when done correctly, the benefits are tremendous. Unlike traditional advertising methods such as direct mail, your blog posts will be sought out and found for years to come on the web. It's the direct mail piece that's always in your prospect's mailbox, just waiting to be found. 

CASE STUDY: PROBLEM SOLVER

Less to worry about

Chris Demato,
owner of
Rock Bottom
Landscaping
& Fencing

Finding a way to keep good employees on staff year-round has been a positive investment for one landscape firm. BY CASEY PAYTON

THE PROBLEM: Chris Demato, owner of Rock Bottom Landscaping & Fencing in Somerset County, N.J., was sick of worrying about losing valuable employees to other lines of work during the offseason.

THE INSPIRATION: Navigating the January to March lull can be tricky for landscape company owners. Brainstorming ways to approach the winter layoff differently, Demato decided to abolish the layoff period altogether.

THE SOLUTION: Employing quality people is the key to running a successful service business, Demato says. With a staff of 10 employees, losing one to another line of work can be devastating. To reduce the chances of that happening, four years ago Demato revamped his pay plan to keep employees on the payroll throughout the winter. A growing snow business also justified keeping a full-time staff.

In 15 years of business, Demato typically retained most of his workforce. Still, he always felt nervous he could lose someone over the winter.

Originally, Rock Bottom employees were on payroll during the regular season, March to December. From January to March, the company's snow operation paid per snow event. The company would round up workers when it snowed or when a job came up. With this setup, employees didn't have a steady income throughout the winter and had to hope Mother Nature came through

with some work. This scenario left employees uncertain when another check would come in, and uncertainty can lead employees astray.

Demato decided restructuring his pay plan was the best way to keep valuable employees around. Under the new plan, employees are paid for 40-hour workweeks through the winter—instead of one-time payments whenever a snow event or a job came in. If one winter brings above average snowfall, employees get bonus pay for extra time worked. But now, they aren't penalized for a below average winter. Often, they don't even work 40 hours a week.

To devise the plan, Demato considered the average amount Rock Bottom paid out over the past few winters and budgeted for that amount. The new plan cost about 20 percent more than he was expecting. Still, Demato says it's worth the investment.

"That extra money is well worth the advantage of having employees available at our convenience during the winter," Demato says. "We also get emergency calls through the winter for fallen trees or cleanups, and now we have workers ready to go at any time, whereas before we would have to coordinate a specific day and time."

Most Rock Bottom employees are on the new pay plan. The company averages one new employee per year, and Demato vets new team members before giving them year-round pay




status. Some employees have opted out due to other offseason work or a lack of affinity for snow work.

A side benefit is the positive effect on quality and customer service, as employees become more familiar with clients and their properties. And employee longevity has become a selling point for the company.

"It allows us to talk about the cumulative years of experience of the entire crew," Demato says. "Customers love to see familiar faces and have formed relationships with our employees over the years."

Though the new payment structure costs more, the peace of mind that's come with it is worth the investment, Demato says.

"I fixed the problem of having to worry about losing our experienced and qualified help," Demato says. "And my employees are also very happy about the stability of the year-round employment. It's a win-win." 

Payton is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia.

BUSINESS BREAKDOWN

COMPANY: Rock Bottom Landscaping & Fencing

HEADQUARTERS: Somerset County, N.J.

REVENUE: Not disclosed

EMPLOYEES: 10

CLIENT MIX: 50 percent commercial; 50 percent residential

SERVICE MIX: 80 percent design/build; 20 percent maintenance, including snow removal

PRODUCT FOCUS

STAND-ON MOWERS



← SRS Z2 RIDING MOWER

COMPANY: Ferris

URL: FerrisMowers.com

The Soft Ride Stand-on (SRS) Z2 mower features an adjustable operator platform and ground speeds of up to 10 mph. It's available with either a 52- or 61-in. iCD Cutting System with professional lawn striping kit. Choose between a Briggs & Stratton Vanguard 810cc EFI or Kawasaki FX801V engine.

↓ STANDER ZK MOWER

COMPANY: Wright Manufacturing

URL: WrightMfg.com

This zero-turn mower offers a large foot platform, easy to step off to exit or pick up debris. It also features a 5-gal. debris container. It's available with



a 52-, 61- or 72-in. AERO-CORE deck, push-button deck lift, 25.5- or 27-hp engine, mowing speed of 12.5 mph and fully independent left/right hydro systems.

↓ PURSUIT SERIES

COMPANY: Dixie Chopper

URL: DixieChopper.com

Choose from single or dual drive and from 32-, 35- and 44-in. deck sizes to fit into tight areas. The series features an 18-hp professional series engine from Briggs & Stratton. Dual-drive models come standard



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SUPER S SERIES

COMPANY: Hustler

URL: HustlerTurf.com

With a compact stance and ground speed up to 9 mph, the Super S stand-on mower features ergonomic controls and Hustler's SmoothTrak steering. Its cut height ranges from 1.5 to 5.5 in. It's available in four deck sizes, with the toughest frame and deck in category, the company says.



60-IN. VANTAGE S-SERIES PROPANE STAND-ON RIDER

COMPANY: Exmark

URL: Exmark.com

Exmark added a 60-in. version of its Vantage S-Series Propane stand-on rider. The UltraCut Series 4 cutting deck features flow-control baffles for increased cut quality. Maintenance-reducing features include sealed, no-maintenance spindles and patented spherical bearing idler arm pivots.

SZT PRO SERIES

COMPANY: Jacobsen

URL: Jacobsen.com

Available with either a 48- (SZT 2648) or 54-in. (SZT2654) deck, the new SZT Pro series features a 26-hp engine. The stand-on mower's small footprint allows it to maneuver in tight areas and take up less trailer space. To use the SZT as a walk-behind, flip up the operator platform.





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Second-gen growth

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He looks forward to using the industry's new smart irrigation technology as it becomes more affordable and accessible. Garcia also "daydreams" about one day running the company with his own children, just as he and his father-in-law used to do.

Hulsey, who still has an office in the building, stops in occasionally to see how things are going. While the company's founder is no longer officially involved in any of the company's operations, Garcia still relies on his father-in-law for advice, insight and knowledge. After all, aside from Garcia, there's no one who knows the ins and outs of the company better.

"I still bounce ideas off him and vent about problems," Garcia says. "We always joke that there are situations that happen to me where he's the only other person on the planet who would understand because he's the only one who's been in my exact shoes." 

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Charlotte, N.C.

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LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT (ISSN 0894-1254) is published monthly by North Coast Media LLC, IMC Center, 1360 East 9th Street, Suite 1070, Cleveland, OH 44114. Subscription rates: For US, Canada and Mexico, 1 year \$59.95 print and digital; two years \$95.95 print and digital. All other countries, 1 year print and digital \$169.95; two years \$255.95. For air-expedited service, include an additional \$75 per order annually. Single copies (prepaid only) \$10 plus postage and handling. For current single copy or back issues, call 847-765-4942. Periodicals postage paid at Cleveland OH 44101-9603 and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address change to Landscape Management, PO Box 2090, Skokie, IL 60076. Printed in the U.S.A.



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Crystal Arlington, CSP, LIC

PRESIDENT
AFFILIATED GROUNDS MAINTENANCE GROUP
LAKE CITY, PA.

EDUCATION

Fairview High School
Fairview, Pa.
Class of 1991

Mercyhurst University
Associate Degree
Early Childhood Education
2005-2008

WORK EXPERIENCE

1984-1999

Sole proprietor
Mowing, shoveling,
other landscape work

1989-1995

Various part-time jobs,
including Pizza Hut,
Giant Eagle, a local restaurant
and state liquor store
Server, clerk

1999-Present

Affiliated Grounds
Maintenance Group
President
Lake City, Pa.



Arlington's husband, Rich Arlington III, owns Arlington Lawncare and Rich Arlington & Associates. They're both National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) Trailblazers. In February, she was named the NALP's Woman Entrepreneur of the Year.

"(At one point), I did it all out of the back of my '84 Chevy Chevette."



"By 16 I had a baby. Once I had a driver's license, I fed her by mowing lawns." Arlington's daughter, Jennifer, is 26, her son, Richard IV, is 19, and she has a 5-year-old granddaughter, Raychel.

"I really wasn't fond of waitressing. I liked the outdoor work more than anything."

"In 2006, I became nationally certified as a Woman Business Enterprise and went hog wild."



"It wasn't until 1999 that I set up Affiliated Grounds Maintenance Group, and that was because Kohl's asked us to take over the whole East Coast for them. They were looking for minority- and women-owned service providers."

WORDS OF WISDOM "Honesty is really the best policy. People get in trouble by sugarcoating things, like promising a client something you can't do. I think I'm very fortunate in life because I give back and I'm truthful." • "If you want to be somewhere in life, you have to be willing to give up things, sacrifice and do the work, especially when you don't want to do the work. You don't get things handed to you, and you have to believe in what you're working for." • "Yeah, you're going to lose accounts to low-ballers. I've had another large company go to a major account of mine and offer to do it for free for a year if they'd get rid of me. Do you think they got their problems solved when they were getting service for free? Think about it. The customers always end up hiring you back."

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